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Author(s): Robert Blust

Source: *Anthropos*, Bd. 94, H. 4./6. (1999), pp. 487-499

Published by: [Anthropos Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40465016>

Accessed: 29-04-2015 21:07 UTC

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The Fox's Wedding

Robert Blust

Abstract: – A universal Japanese folk belief holds that a sunshower signals “the fox’s wedding.” In seeking to understand the basis for this association the folklore of sunshowers and rainbows in other parts of the world is briefly surveyed. Although no clear-cut functional explanation is forthcoming, it is seen that sunshowers are widely regarded as events which entail spiritual danger, while foxes are regarded as tricksters capable of metamorphosis into human shape. A similar association of names (“fox’s belt,” “fox’s wedding”) is documented for the rainbow in various parts of Europe, while over much of Africa and in Southeast Asia the connection is between sunshowers and bestial parturition. [*Sunshowers, rainbows, foxes, folk beliefs, psychological universals*]

Robert Blust is a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa in Honolulu. He is the author of some 150 publications, mainly in the area of Austronesian comparative linguistics and culture history.

1 The Fox’s Wedding in Japan

In the opening scenes of his film “Dreams” (1990), the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa has produced what at first sight appears to be a triumph of pure imagination. A boy of seven or eight is standing outside the courtyard of his country house in a light drizzle, while the sun shines through. From the courtyard his mother warns him this is not a day to be outside, as the fox has his wedding in such weather, and will become angry if seen by human eyes. This scene dissolves into another in which the disobedient boy appears alone in the woods, peering between the trunks of large forest trees while a steamy vapor rises from the forest floor. There is a sense of danger in this primeval scene, but the viewer cannot identify its source. Gradually the mist clears and the fox with his retinue appears through the trees, walking upright like a man and dressed in splendid finery for his wedding. As the startled and incredulous child watches in wonder the procession continues slowly through the forest, striking a series of frozen dance postures to the accompaniment of flute and drum. Suddenly the fox turns his head and sees the boy, who flees. A change of scene returns him to the

courtyard of his house, where his mother sternly awaits him with a message that the fox has paid her a visit and left something for him. It is a bamboo scabbard encasing a knife to be used for ritual suicide: the boy has offended the fox and must pay with his life. With remarkable detachment the mother dictates a final option to her son. The fox lives at the end of the rainbow, and the boy can go there to plead with him for mercy. In the final scene of this cinematic vignette the child is wandering through a field of wildflowers ablaze with riotous color, moving toward a retreating rainbow which arches over it in the distance.

Part of this portrayal is brilliant artistic imagination, but another part is borrowed from folk tradition. In virtually every prefecture in Japan a sunshower is called *kitsune no yomeiri* “the fox’s wedding,” and it is said that during a sunshower the male fox is taking his bride.

How would such a tradition come into being? Some folk beliefs have relatively transparent motivations, and could easily have arisen independently in widely separated regions, giving rise to universal folkloric motifs (cf. Thompson 1958 for numerous examples). By contrast, the representation of a sunshower as the fox’s wedding appears to be completely arbitrary – a unique product of culture and history. What does the fox represent? Why is he marrying at that delicate moment when the sun and rain struggle for supremacy? In short, what is the *meaning* of this fundamental belief in traditional Japanese culture?

2 Functional and Historical Explanations

The foregoing questions are concerned with *functional* explanations, and the answers to them are important elements in grasping the meaning of any folk tradition. They are, in effect, the mainstay of ethnography. There is, however, another class of questions which is equally important, but of a quite different character. This type of question

seeks *distributional* explanations for culture traits, and may under favorable circumstances provide clues to functional explanations. Questions of this sort are the mainstay of ethnology.

Functional explanations seek to integrate an isolated observation into a more inclusive network of relationships within a synchronic system. Thus, with the fox's wedding we would want to ask questions such as: 1) what is the significance/symbolism of the fox?, 2) what is the significance/symbolism of the wedding? (who is the bride?), 3) what is the connection of this mythical event with the natural event of a sunshower or rainbow?

Historical explanations seek to integrate an isolated observation into a more inclusive network of relationships within a spatial distribution type. In this approach what we want to know above all else is the distribution type: is the belief in the fox's wedding unique to Japan, or is it also found elsewhere? If it is found elsewhere, is it found in areas that are geographically contiguous with Japan or in widely separated regions? Finally, is it found only among linguistically related peoples, or among linguistically diverse peoples (a vacuous question in the particular case if Japanese is a linguistic isolate, but a meaningful question in the general case).

3 Toward a Functional Explanation of the Fox's Wedding

It might as well be stated at the outset that a definitive functional explanation for the fox's wedding in Japan and similar beliefs in other parts of the world which will be mentioned below cannot yet be offered. However, some of the elements which must ultimately figure in such an explanation can be brought together in a comparative context here.

3.1 Sunshowers

The weather is of interest to people everywhere, and unusual types of weather phenomena tend to produce the greatest interest, at times bordering on fascination. Since rain normally falls from a cloudy sky, ordinary rain elicits rather ordinary reactions in most cultures. But what of rain that falls from a sunny sky?

Sunshowers (rain while the sun is shining) stand outside the daily round of experience. Something about them seems unnatural. Indeed, because they are defined by the simultaneous presence of sun

and rain, sunshowers are closely connected with the rainbow, a natural phenomenon which is all but universally associated with the "other world." Given their rarity, near inseparability, and obscure causality, both sunshowers and rainbows commonly evoke reactions which appeal to supernatural agency.¹

In Malay a sunshower is called *hujan panas*, "hot rain" (*hujan* "rain" + *panas* "hot"). The physical basis for this characterization is immediately apparent, given the presence of sunlight while fine raindrops are falling. But this is not the most important aspect of the name. Throughout Indonesia the categorial opposition of "hot" and "cool" is used to mark states of harmony with the spirit world; a person, place, or social condition is said to be "hot" if it is spiritually disharmonious or out of balance, and rites of "cooling" must be performed to restore the desired equilibrium, thereby ensuring the spiritual safety of those who might otherwise be endangered. "Hot" rain is thus spiritually dangerous rain. Given this conception it is not surprising that during a sunshower Malay children are hurried indoors out of fear that the rain may touch their skin, and so cause disease or fever.² While the details of this belief system differ from those present in the fox's wedding, the generic similarities are readily apparent: sunshow-

1 The universal connection of the rainbow with the "other world," often in a menacing role, is given brief notice in most encyclopaedias of folklore, as in Hole (1983). Areal surveys which fill in many details of this connection include Bader (1971), Barnes (1973), and Kruyt (1938) for Indonesia, Elkin (1930–1931) and Radcliffe-Brown (1930–1931) for Australia, various of the "culture element distributions" studies conducted for western North America under the aegis of A. L. Kroeber at the University of California during the 1930s and 1940s, including Drucker (1937), Essene (1942), Gifford (1940), and Voegelin (1942), Lévi-Strauss (1970) for South America, de Heusch (1982: 34–75) for central Africa, and Alinei (1983a, 1983b) for Europe. Much of this literature is brought together in Blust (n.d.).

2 Rites of "cooling" to restore a state of spiritual balance are mentioned explicitly for the Iban of southwest Borneo (Sather 1993: 84 ff.), the Mentawai in the Barrier Islands, west of Sumatra (Nooy-Palm 1972: 43), the Rotinese, west of Timor in the Lesser Sunda chain (Fox 1972: 108), and the Kédang, in the Solor archipelago east of Timor (Barnes 1974: 73, 193). Many of the examples of beliefs concerning sunshowers in Indonesia and the Pacific are cited as personal communications from native participants or nonnative fieldworkers. South American examples were obtained in April and May, 1982, through the good offices of S. H. Levinsohn, Director, and Stephen L. Walter, Linguistics and Anthropology Coordinator, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Colombia Branch. I would here like to offer a blanket note of thanks to all who have assisted me in the collection of relevant data.

ers are a sign of spiritual danger, and while they are present children should be put indoors to avoid potentially harmful consequences.

Similar concepts are also found among other Austronesian-speaking peoples in insular Southeast Asia. The Ngaju Dayak of southeastern Borneo say that people will get sick if touched by the raindrops in a sunshower, as this is a spiritually dangerous time when giant crocodiles and dragon-like serpents that emerge from within the earth wander over the land (Durdje Durasid, p.c.). Among the Alune of Seram in eastern Indonesia "sunshowers (*ulane 'abelane*) are considered to bear illness – flu-like symptoms. Young children are strongly discouraged from going out or playing in sunshowers" (Margaret Florey, p.c.). The Manobo of southern Mindanao in the Philippines believe that evil spirits prowl about during "sunny day rain," and that protection against them can be insured by tying a piece of sword grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) in the hair or around the head (Demetrio 1970/3: 716). In a brief section entitled "Hot Rain," Evans (1953: 189) reports virtually identical notions of spiritual danger and protection among the Tempasuk Dusun of Sabah (north Borneo). Elsewhere, Evans (1937: 72 ff.) notes that the Austroasiatic-speaking Grik Negritos of the Malay peninsula sometimes wear kilts made of the black and shiny rhizomorphs of a fungus which is thought to provide protection from the sickness produced by contact with "hot rain."

Although these ideas about the spiritual danger of sunshowers seem to follow naturally in societies which acknowledge a categorial opposition of hot : cool to signal states of spiritual imbalance and restoration, there is reason to believe that the latter opposition is a secondary elaboration of primary ideas about the danger of sunshowers. Categorial cool : hot oppositions are found in other parts of the world, as in China and Mexico, where they generally apply to foodstuffs, but the use of such a contrast to represent states of spiritual equilibrium appears to be peculiar to insular Southeast Asia. A belief in the spiritual danger of sunshowers, however, is far more widespread.

The Austronesian-speaking Suau of southeastern Papua hold that if the raindrops in a sunshower should touch a child it will fall sick (Michael Morauta, p.c.). According to Rivers (1924: 47), on Eddystone Island in the western Solomons epidemic disease is attributed to a class of spirits called "Ave" "whose coming is indicated by the presence of broken rainbows, shooting stars, red clouds, and showers of fine rain while the sun is shining. The symptoms of the disease produced

by Ave are fever, headache, and cough." In much the same vein, the Trukese of Micronesia say that if rain from a sunshower should touch a pregnant woman she could miscarry, as it is a malevolent spirit trying to kill her unborn child (John Sound, p.c.).

Strikingly, in several Papuan-speaking societies of New Guinea for which data is available the associations of sunshowers are extremely positive, but negative associations similar to those reported above appear again in northwest South America. The Inga, a Quechuan group in the highlands of southwest Colombia, say that "it is very bad to bathe when a rainbow is visible, as the rainbow will urinate on you, and you will break out in a rash (one of the herbal remedies for such rashes is called 'rainbow tree')" (S. H. Levinsohn, p.c.). Similar notions are found among the Chibchan-speaking Cuaiquer of Colombia, who distinguish large and small rainbows, both of which shine brightly when they urinate (Stephen L. Walter, p.c.). Although the focus of these remarks is the rainbow, the notion of a rainbow urinating is a fairly transparent, if somewhat oblique reference to a sunshower.³

In short, the participation of *hujan panas* in a wider network of categorial hot : cool oppositions which signal states of spiritual equilibrium or disequilibrium appears to be a secondary elaboration on earlier and more widespread ideas about sunshowers. In these abnormal states of Nature there is a commingling of hot and cold, of fire and water, of seemingly irreconcilable opposites that fuse and cause a blurring of categorial boundaries. To one lacking access to modern scientific explanations it is perhaps not surprising that such bizarre states of the natural world suggest mischievous or malevolent spiritual causation, or a contest of supernatural forces struggling for supremacy. Such ideas seem very basic, and it is not at all inconceivable that they would have arisen independently in widely separated regions. Thus far we appear to be on relatively firm ground, but why are sunshowers connected with the fox?

3 Cp. the expressions in Kuusi (1957), where during a sunshower it is said that 1. a wolf is urinating/defecating (41 f.), 2. various animals (spider, chicken, midge) are relieving themselves (49 f.), 3. God is urinating (81), 4. the Devil is bathing his old wife so that her urine drips down (129), 5. the old people are relieving themselves (161–163), 6. a certain person is defecating (174), and his remark that among the Turkic-speaking Yakut and Buriat of Siberia a commonly-encountered expression for the rainbow is "fox's urine" (353).

3.2 The Fox in Japan

Most sources agree that the fox has a special place in Japanese folklore. Dorson (1975: 128), citing the earlier work of M.W. de Visser (1908), points out the double character of the *kitsune*, or fox. On the one hand it is regarded as the messenger of Inari, the goddess of rice, and in this role it has positive associations. On the other hand, as in many parts of the world the fox is seen as a trickster, capable of assuming human form and of crafty deceptions, or even of possessing men. According to Hearn (1923: 358 ff.), who devotes an entire chapter to *kitsune* folklore, "Innumerable are the stories told or written about the wiles of fox women. And a dangerous woman of that class whose art is to enslave men, and strip them of all they possess, is popularly named by a word of deadly insult – *kitsune*."⁴ Some families were traditionally believed to be fox-possessed, or *kitsune-mochi*. Girls from such families had great difficulty finding a husband, as men would fear their metamorphic powers.

It is difficult to say how much of this belief-complex is native to Japan, since very similar ideas are found in China. As Werner (1958: 370) observes: "Among the many animals worshipped by the Chinese, those at times seen emerging from coffins or graves naturally hold a prominent place. They are supposed to be transmigrated souls of deceased human beings. We should therefore expect such animals as the fox, stoat, weasel, etc., to be closely associated with the worship of ghosts, spirits, and suchlike creatures, and that they should be the subjects of, or included in, a large number of Chinese legends. This we find. Of these animals the fox is mentioned in Chinese legendary lore perhaps more often than any other . . . Generally, the fox is a creature of ill omen, long-lived (living to eight hundred or even a thousand years), with a peculiar virtue in every part of his body, able to produce fire by striking the ground with his tail, cunning, cautious, sceptical, able to see into the future, to transform himself (usually into old men, or scholars, or pretty young maidens), and fond of playing pranks and tormenting mankind."

Many Chinese tales are told of men travelling alone at evening on country roads who are seduced by a beautiful young woman who obligingly

offers to spend the night with the lonely traveller in a charming country inn. When the man wakes the next morning, he discovers that the inn is in reality a filthy hovel, and from the remnants on the table he realizes in disgust that the banquet he had so relished in his deception of the previous night was nothing more than fox dung.

Mackenzie (1923: 221) adds that "Foxes and wolves were, like dragons, capable of assuming human form and figure among the were-animals of the Far East. As these were-animals include the tiger, which is a god in China, it is possible that they were ancient deities." Finally, the supernatural ability of the fox to produce fire by striking the ground with its tail, which Werner reports in China, is a widespread belief in Japan, where forest fires and even house fires traditionally were attributed in many cases to what amounts to vulpine arson (Krappe 1944: 133).⁵

In his global survey of folklore motifs Thompson (1958), sub *fox* notes a number of the above points, and some others, including examples of marriage to a fox either in animal or in human form. In general these references do little to shed further light on the meaning of the fox's wedding in Japan, and so we are left with fragments of an explanation: 1) sunshowers are times of spiritual danger, and children, as the most vulnerable potential victims, must be protected from them, and 2) the fox is a cunning deceiver with supernatural powers, capable of metamorphosis into human form, and perhaps most dangerous to adult men. Beyond this it is very difficult to press the analysis: both sunshowers and foxes present a kind of supernatural danger to humans, but why they should be conjoined, and in particular why the fox should be going to his wedding at the time of a sunshower remains elusive.

4 One is, of course, reminded here of the double sense of English "vixen," and of the apparently more recent use of "foxy" to refer to an appealing woman not quite to be trusted.

5 Although standard lexicographical sources provide no information on the origin of the name, the English word "fox fire" refers to the phosphorescent light emitted by certain fungi on decaying timber, a type of natural phenomenon commonly associated with the spirit world (Blust to appear). In a useful comparative study Krappe (1944: 133) points out that in China "The *ignis fatui* or will o' the wisp is commonly referred to as 'fox fire'," and he argues that the association of foxes with fires, which he reports in China, Japan, and among the Jicarilla Apache of New Mexico "has its basis in the red color of the animal, especially of its tail . . . It is a peculiar type of associative thinking which is responsible for these beliefs and which, because of its very universality, goes far to prove the essential identity of the human mind." Kuusi (1957: 335 ff.) notes some of the same connections without, however, appealing to universals of human psychology.

4 Toward a Historical/Distributional Explanation of the Fox's Wedding

Blust (1981) proposed a typology of culture trait distributions together with their optimal explanations, which can be summarized as follows. The proposed explanations for distribution types are given (in order of plausibility) in terms of

A. *convergence*, or *independent invention* (where the explanatory mechanism is either that of limited possibilities or that of "the psychic unity of mankind"),

B. *diffusion* (historical contact, with borrowing), or

C. *common inheritance* (lineal transmission from a common cultural antecedent).

Indeterminate choices of rank order are separated by a slash.

Table 1: Types of Culture Trait Distributions and Their Proposed Explanations

Type	Linguistically Related	Continuous	Natural	Explanation
1	+	+	+	C, A/B
2	–	+	+	A/B
3	+	+	–	B/C
4	–	+	–	B
5	+	–	+	A/C
6	–	–	+	A
7	+	–	–	C
8	–	–	–	nonoccurring

Briefly, Table 1 can be read as follows:

If a trait is continuously distributed (+ continuous) within a group of linguistically related peoples (+ linguistically related) and also appears in other parts of the world (+ natural) A, B, and C are, in the absence of further information, all equally plausible explanations for the distribution. If the trait were associated with cognate linguistic forms, thus permitting a reconstruction of terminology relating to it C would be favored. For example, head-hunting, which was once found among almost all Austronesian-speaking peoples in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and among a few further east, is also reported from Yunnan, Assam, parts of New Guinea, Nigeria, and Central and South America. Given the likelihood of independent development in the latter cases, the possibility exists that even among Austronesian-speaking societies head-hunting developed independently in several areas, or acquired its attested distribution through borrowing. The reconstruction of Proto-Austronesian **kayaw* "hunt heads, go

head-hunting," however, settles the matter decisively in favor of interpretation C.

Space will not permit full exemplification of all distribution types, but this illustration should suffice to show how other distributions would favor different explanations, a point that will arise again as we consider further data below. The fundamental rule in approaching distributional explanations is that different distribution types favor different explanations, or a different hierarchy of explanations.

If functional explanations do not appear capable of shedding further light on the fox's wedding in Japan, perhaps further insight can be gained from historical explanations. The first question to ask is "are similar beliefs found elsewhere?"

Starting in those areas which are most nearly contiguous with Japan (ignoring the narrow water passage from the Korean peninsula to Kyūshū), we first discover that a similar idea is found in Korea, where during a sunshower it is traditionally said that the male fox or the male tiger is taking his wife. The interchangeability of fox and tiger reportedly is a matter of interpersonal variation, but may represent regional differences from a time when the population of Korea was demographically more localized (Minsun Song, p.c.). Little, if any, published information appears to be available on the Korean belief, at least in English. To date no published information of any kind has been found associating either the fox or tiger with sunshowers in China, and personal interviews with a number of Chinese have also produced negative results.

If the tradition of the fox's wedding were restricted to just Japan and Korea its distribution could be explained plausibly as a product of diffusion, or perhaps remote common origin. In the former case the distribution could have arisen in either of two ways: 1) the trait may have been borrowed between geographically contiguous peoples on the Korean peninsula, and then transported to Japan by bearers of the Yayoi archaeological culture beginning about 2,300 years ago, or 2) the trait may have diffused from Korea to Japan or vice versa through cultural contact after the separation of Korean and Japanese speakers. A somewhat less favored alternative, that of remote common origin, could be entertained if one accepts arguments for the genetic relationship of the Korean and Japanese languages, since such a hypothesis implies a single community of origin. What makes this interpretation less favored is first, the problematic nature of the proposed Japanese-Korean linguistic relationship, and second, the problem of explaining why a seemingly arbitrary culture

trait would persist in divergent cultural traditions for millenia after their separation from a common ancestor.

As it turns out these choices fade into insignificance when we discover 1. the wider distribution of the fox's wedding, and 2. the embedding of the fox's wedding within a larger context of beliefs about sunshowers and bestial parturition.

Appendix 2 documents the distribution of the fox's wedding as an epithet for the sunshower in Europe, the Levant, South Asia and East Asia. Even within these regions the distribution of the trait is geographically discontinuous. Thus in Europe a sunshower is said to signal the fox's wedding in Finland, southwestern portions of England, Bulgaria, Corsica, Sicily, and among Greek speakers in Calabria, to which we should perhaps add the Spanish Basque description of a double rainbow as the fox's wedding.

Although the association of sunshowers with the fox's wedding is not presently known beyond the continental landmass of Eurasia, beliefs which have a clear symbolic association with this trait complex are widespread in Africa. Among the Obolo, or Andoni of the Cross River region of Nigeria, very small children reportedly believe that the rainbow is a python, but in time they learn from the elders that the rainbow is the rain and the sun struggling for dominance. The children are then taught a song which means "the leopard has delivered a child at the foot of the *ako* tree" (a tall hardwood which grows in the bush). This song is sung by the children whenever they see a rainbow from that time onward. Closely similar is the belief among the Ijo (Ijaw) of the Niger delta that during a sunshower a leopard is giving birth in the forest. During a sunshower the Moru of the southern Sudan say that a hyena is giving birth, the Haya of the western edge of Lake Victoria in Tanzania say that a lion is giving birth, and among the Northern Chumburu of Ghana the appropriate comment on seeing a rainbow is "the elephant has given birth!"⁶

6 Much of this information was collected on a questionnaire about the ethnology of the rainbow which I distributed among many people around the world during the period 1981–1984. I am particularly grateful to Kay Williamson, who supplied the data for Nigeria, to Philip Hewer, then Associate Director for Language Projects at the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation for the data on Northern Chumburu, and to Darius Jonathan, a native speaker of Moru, and Abdu Khamisi, a native speaker of Haya, both of whom were graduate students in linguistics at the University of Hawaii between 1984 and 1990. In addition, Kay Williamson supplied a printed reference to the Ijo belief (Timitimi 1971: 34) which I have been unable to consult.

Although all of these beliefs are from African societies, they range over a vast territory, and include very distinct language groups (Moru belongs to the Sudanic branch of Nilo-Saharan, and while all of the other languages are Niger-Kordofanian, they belong to very divergent groupings within it).

Returning to Table 1, the fox's wedding and related beliefs about bestial parturition in connection with the sunshower now fall clearly into a Type 6 distribution: the belief appears among linguistically unrelated peoples, its geography is discontinuous, and it is widespread in the world. Given this distribution type the preferred explanation is convergence, or independent invention. Even within more limited geographical areas, as Europe, Asia, or Africa the distribution of this belief does not point compellingly to diffusion; there is no substantive argument, for example, that the belief in portions of southwest England has arisen through contact with any of the other areas in Europe in which similar expressions are used. Between the African or Southeast Asian beliefs connecting the sunshower with bestial parturition and the more narrowly-defined fox's wedding the probability of shared similarity due to borrowing is virtually nil.

5 The Diffusionist Position

In a monumental study Kuusi (1957) documented over 1,300 folk expressions for the sunshower. For reasons of accessibility his sample is heavily biased toward Europe and the Levant (particularly Turkey). Nonetheless the materials collected exhibit an impressive range of variation. Kuusi's material, which takes up over 200 pages of text, is so voluminous that at times his attempts to assign it to manageable categories simply breaks down: witness such category labels as "Alternating expressions for animals" (50–52), "Various expressions about the inhabitants of Heaven" (81–84), "Various things about the Devil" (129), "Various on witches and spinsters" (163 f.), "Various about Gypsies, etc." (174–178), "Various love topics, weddings, etc." (194–197), or "Various signs of death" (199 f.), when each of the head words in these expressions appears elsewhere in more specific collocations such as "Animal birth," "Wedding in Heaven," "The Devil is beating his wife," "Old witch or whore's wedding," "Gypsies, etc. are bathing," "Animal death," and so on. In the most extreme cases catchall categories were used, as with "Various" (203–205), followed somewhat

redundantly by "Miscellaneous" (226 f.). The difficulty Kuusi faced in ordering his material was the familiar "librarian's problem": given a book about, say, Chinese art, should it be placed in the China collection or the art collection?

Appendix 1 presents an overview of the range of semantic categories recognized by Kuusi, with slight modifications where the original category was internally complex and capable of further differentiation. A quick scan of this list provides some useful preliminary information. First, the most frequently cited expression in connection with the sunshower is "the Devil is beating his wife." Second, many of the expressions evoke a sense of irony or paradox, as with the "Carnival in Hell (or in a parsonage)," "Birth of ghosts," "Old witch or whore's wedding," or "Whore's child is baptised." Indeed, one of the categories that Kuusi recognizes is simply "Paradox: symbol of contradiction or impossibility." Third, throughout Europe there has been an evident reinterpretation of an older set of beliefs within the conceptual framework of Christianity, seen in frequent references to Heaven and Hell, the Devil, witches, the Virgin Mary and blatantly xenophobic references to Jews and Gypsies.

Although the most frequent expression which Kuusi cites in connection with the sunshower is "The Devil is beating his wife," this association is confined to the languages of Europe, and to transplanted European folk traditions in North America. By contrast, "The fox's wedding," either in its narrow sense or in the extended sense which includes bestial parturition, is associated with the sunshower (or occasionally rainbow) in Europe, the Levant, Africa, South Asia, and East Asia – a far wider and more scattered distribution. The paradoxical nature of a sunshower (or rainbow) is perhaps self-evident: sunshine and rain tend to be conceived as mutually exclusive categories, and their union is thus inherently contradictory. The real challenge is to understand why sunshowers have come to acquire the seemingly arbitrary association with the fox's wedding and closely similar expressions in various parts of Eurasia. Kuusi clearly recognized this as the most serious problem presented by the data he collected, and he devoted a 39 page section (332–370), about 23% of his entire discussion of the data, to the "Origin and metamorphoses of the theme 'Fox's wedding.'"

Kuusi's answer to this question is straightforward. Appealing to traditional methods in folklore, he proposes an explicitly *historical* explanation for the distribution of this culture trait. The starting

point in his nexus of contacts, diffusion, and transformation is a proposal that the sunshower was first portrayed as the semen of a celestial fox deity in prehistoric India (362 ff.). From India, according to Kuusi, the belief in a celestial fox deity spread eastward to Japan, mutating into the incendiary fox trickster and goddess of rice. From India it spread westward into western Asia and North Africa as the fox or wolf deity of death, and from western Asia and North Africa into the various European beliefs connected with the sunshower, as well as into Africa. The schema that Kuusi presents is explicit – and thoroughly unconvincing. He fails to provide a methodologically replicable basis for his theoretical starting point in India. He fails to explain why the belief in the fox's wedding is present in India and Japan but appears to be completely lacking in Chinese culture, despite the rich development of a general Chinese folklore about the fox as erotic trickster. He fails to explain why a general belief in a celestial fox deity which diffused from India would undergo parallel transformations during the diffusion process in widely separated regions, to produce such strikingly similar – and apparently arbitrary – results. He fails to explain how regions such as western Asia or North Africa could be sources for the tradition of the fox's wedding in Subsaharan Africa, when the beliefs reported for the proposed source region refer overwhelmingly to a wedding, while those reported for Subsaharan Africa refer almost exclusively to bestial parturition, except in cases where there is reason to assume European influence or reinterpretation, as in South Africa (see Appendix 2). Perhaps the most damning criticism of the diffusionist position, however, is that the fox's wedding is just one of many globally attested trait distributions, and few if any of these come even close to approximating a coincident distribution. To cite just one example, a globally distributed taboo against pointing at the rainbow with the index finger (Blust n.d.) appears in some of the regions where the belief in the fox's wedding is found (parts of Europe and Africa, Southeast Asia), but not in others (the Levant, India, Japan). If each of these trait distributions and others like them is a product of diffusion, the networks of contact through which diffusion operated must have shifted dramatically over time, in ways that cannot be controlled by historical or ethnological information. In short, Kuusi's diffusionist explanation is a heroic, but ultimately unpersuasive attempt to deal with a trait distribution which can only adequately be understood as a special case of a more general class of problems for

which the schema in Table 1 provides an explanatory key.

6 The Polygenetic Alternative

Alinei (1983b: 153), referring to the work of Vladimir Propp, has expressed skepticism about facile appeals to diffusionism when a polygenetic alternative appears at least equally plausible: "Obviously, no scholar will deny the importance of *diffusion* in cultural geography and history, but it is one thing to see diffusion where it belongs, and another to seek it where a polygenetic assumption is much more productive, and supported by relevant data. The two methods complement each other: neither of them should become the only possible explanation for historical and geographical aspects of culture." These words essentially reiterate views that were explicitly articulated more than a century earlier by Tylor (1871), and the fact that it is necessary to continue to repeat them may be seen as an indication of how readily ideas that are sound in themselves can be undermined by carrying them to unbalanced extremes. Science in general does not work so much with certainties as with the elimination of alternative explanations. Accepted scientific knowledge is thus that body of hypotheses which has survived the test of critical scrutiny more successfully than its competitors (Popper 1968). Even if it is impossible to account for all aspects of the fox's wedding in terms of a polygenetic explanation, it seems clear from the considerations to follow that polygenesis presents fewer intractable problems than diffusion.

There is an intriguing large-scale pattern to the form of the "fox's wedding." The essential constellation of features appears to involve animal parturition or conjugal union in connection with sunshowers or, less often, rainbows, and with few exceptions the association is with a cat-like or dog-like animal (the hyena is neither, but is commonly perceived as canine). The material summarized in Appendix 2 shows 18 instances of "fox," 8 of "jackal," 5 of "wolf," 4 each of "tiger," and "hyena," 3 of "leopard," and 2 of "lion," hence 44 instances of a cat-like or dog-like animal. By contrast, the categories "mice," "bear," "deer," "bird," "elephant," "monkey," and "rabbit" account for only 13 instances. Moreover, some of these probably are duplications, as with the Zulu, Afrikaans and English beliefs about the "monkey's wedding" in South Africa (the last two almost certainly deriving from the first). Since a variety of animal forms is available for such culturally

prescribed associations in most parts of the world, the consistent preference for a cat-like or dog-like animal in most variants of the belief is in need of explanation.

Remarkably, the same type of association recurs in Southeast Asia, although parturition is sometimes replaced by sickness. Evans (1923: 208) reports a belief of this general type among the Malayan aborigines: "According to the Sakai of Jeram Kawan (Sungkai) . . . when there comes a shower followed by sunshine, the rainbow springs up from a place where a tiger has been sick." At such times the Toba Batak of northern Sumatra simply say that tigers are roaming about, but the Sundanese of west Java maintain that a sunshower is a sign that a tiger has given birth, and the Balinese say that */udan ai/* (sun rain) is a time when */memedi ngelah panak/* "the evil spirits that inhabit rivers and quiet places (*/memedi/*) are giving birth."⁷

What kind of unified perspective can be adopted for the entire range of facts that have now been surveyed? In Europe, parts of the Levant and the Far East we see what appears to be an ameliorative reinterpretation: the notion of parturition is shifted to that of conjugal union, and hence the reference is elevated from an act of Nature to a human cultural construct (marriage). Rather than seeing the agreements between the European and Far Eastern beliefs as evidence for diffusion, then, the two can perhaps more plausibly be seen as parallel reinterpretations of an ancient natural symbol.

But what is the psychological motivation behind this symbolic association? The Balinese variant is interesting. Although there are a number of indigenous wild mammals on Bali, sunshowers here are connected with an act of parturition by "spirits," more particularly the minatory spirits of solitary places where one could meet an unfortunate end. Similar cases are cited by Kuusi from Europe, in some cases with a familiar Christian overlay (Appendix 1, "Devil is born," "Ghosts are born"). This suggests that the animal beings which are connected with sunshowers are theriomorphic representatives of the spirit world. It is perhaps worth noting that "were-animals" are almost invariably drawn from the same set of cat-like and dog-like natural representatives, from the werewolf of Europe to the were-jaguar of tropical South

7 Again, much of this material has been supplied by native participants in the cultures in question. I would like to thank Sitor Situmorang and Dudu Prawiraatmaja for information on the Batak and Sundanese beliefs respectively. Adrian Clynes kindly supplied the information on Balinese, supplied by his native speaker wife.

America and the were-tiger of mainland Southeast Asia. In the latter cases there is a clear connection with shamanism: one of the powers that sets the shaman apart from other mortals is his ability to metamorphose into a jaguar or a tiger, both animals that are feared and respected for their nocturnal prowess.

These associations are suggestive, but cannot be more than that. To gain a fuller understanding of the fox's wedding it is perhaps necessary to place the ethnology of sunshowers within the broader context of the ethnology of the rainbow. The rainbow is universally a sign of malevolent spiritual presence, generally portrayed as a giant snake which drinks the rain (Blust n.d.). The connection of the rainbow with the spirit world is not surprising: within prescientific cultures the natural causality of rainbows is completely obscure, and such a visually stunning and awe-inspiring phenomenon can only be attributed to supernatural agency. In scattered portions of the world the associations with rainbow are positive, but in the overwhelming majority of cases reported in the literature the associations with the spirit world are menacing (Blust n.d.). There is an undertone of supernatural danger in the fox's wedding which is palpably present in Kurosawa's vivid screen portrayal, but it rarely surfaces in the brief descriptions made available to the folklorist or ethnographer. In many cases the animal chosen for an association with the sunshower is considered supernaturally dangerous, foxes in particular because they prowl around graves. Perhaps this is the reason that widely separated peoples at various times have chosen to represent the spiritual danger at the time of sunshowers or rainbows by means of the kinds of were-animals that traditionally were associated with the spiritual wanderings of shamans.

Based on present evidence there is one serious problem with a polygenetic explanation for the fox's wedding: no good examples of the belief have been reported among indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, or Remote Oceania. Those examples reported to date for the Americas and Remote Oceania (Vanuatu) seem clearly to be European imports. In Remote Oceania no indigenous wild mammals other than the rat and bat were present prior to Western contact, and this may have been a limiting condition on the appearance of a viable version of the fox's wedding. However, Robert Andreas, a native of Pohnpei in the eastern Caroline Islands of Micronesia informs me that sunshowers in Pohnpei are said to have either of two meanings: 1) they are a sign that a woman

is pregnant, that new life is coming forth, or 2) they are a sign of death. He suggests tentatively that these diametrically opposed interpretations are variants associated with different traditional clans. The first variant (offered immediately and without reflection) is striking in its symbolic connections with the fox's wedding. The simultaneous presence of sun and rain evidently is seen as fecundating, like the fusion of male and female principles, but at the same time the confusion of categorical opposites is perceived as spiritually dangerous.

The indigenous suite of marsupial mammals in Australia offers a rather different range of options for the expression of the fox's wedding than is typical for Africa and Eurasia, but certainly would not prevent *some* form of the belief from surfacing if it is truly motivated by psychological universals. Perhaps the absence of attested indigenous cases here and in the Americas is simply a product of sampling error. Many native American examples of the globally-distributed taboo against pointing at a rainbow were obtained from the "Culture element distributions" organized by A. L. Kroeber at the University of California during the 1930s and 1940s. Much of this information almost certainly would never have been collected had Kroeber not noted the rainbow taboo in one or two cultures, and then included questions about it in researching others. No questions regarding beliefs about sunshowers occur anywhere on these questionnaires, and the absence of documentation cannot, therefore, be taken as evidence for the absence of New World traditions similar to those of the Old World.

7 Conclusion

We have come a long way from the opening scenes of Kurosawa's "Dreams" in terms of placing the fox's wedding in a wider distributional perspective, but important questions remain unanswered. Why are feline and canine animals so often selected, apparently independently in different regions of the earth, for this special connection with sunshowers? And what is the significance of parturition – of birth or rebirth – at such moments of spiritual crisis? Even if answers to these questions are not immediately forthcoming, the distributional facts make it clear that such associations are not merely arbitrary products of culture or history, but point to deeply rooted symbolic processes in human psychology that remain to be fully illuminated.

Appendix 1: Distribution of Expressions for the Sunshower by Semantic Category and Geographical Area (after Kuusi 1957).

Locations are as follows: 1 = Europe, 2 = Levant, 3 = North Africa, 4 = Sub-Saharan Africa, 5 = South Asia, 6 = East Asia, 7 = Southeast Asia, 8 = Pacific, 9 = Americas

Category in Kuusi (slightly modified)	No.	Locations
001. Devil is beating his wife, etc.	164	1 9
002. wedding in Hell	51	1 2
003. marriage of the dead	45	1
004. old witch or whore's wedding	45	1 9
005. fox's wedding	38	1 2 5 6
006. sign of severe weather coming	34	1 2 9
007. a craftsman comes from Heaven or Hell	34	1
008. festival in Hell	34	1 2
009. Devil bathes	32	1
010. wedding in Heaven	31	1 2
011. praise and blessing from God	30	1
012. witches make butter	29	1
013. witches bathe	27	1
014. Jew is baptized, Gypsy gives birth, etc.	24	1
015. various about Gypsies, etc.	24	1
016. Jews/Gypsies hold their weddings	21	1
017. one bathes in Heaven	21	1 2
018. various love topics, weddings, etc.	20	1 9
019. animal wedding	20	1 2 7
020. various expressions for animals	18	1 2
021. spirits bathe, wash or dry off	18	1
022. Heavenly souls (various)	18	1 2
023. various	17	1 2 4 5 9
024. witches are baking	17	1 9
025. an ominous sign	15	1 2 7 9
026. witches comb their hair	14	1
027. sign of a good harvest	13	1 2 7 9
028. fairy and kobold bathe	12	1
029. jackal's wedding	11	2 3 5
030. entry into Heaven	11	1 2
031. one weeps in Heaven	11	1 9
032. Devil is born	11	1
033. orphans weep	11	1
034. the old people excrete	11	1
035. witch born, whore's child baptized	11	
036. various about witches and spinsters	10	1
037. miscellaneous	10	1 2 6 9
038. various signs of death	9	1 2
039. wedding of the unfortunate	9	1 2
040. Gypsies, etc. bathe	9	1
041. bear's wedding/wolf's wedding	9	1 2 3
042. bear's bath/wolf's bath	9	1
043. joy in Heaven	8	1 2
044. Devil fights and gets married	8	1
045. witches in agitation	8	1 9
046. witches dance	8	1
047. witch or old spinster buried	7	1
048. various things about the Devil	7	1 9
049. symbol of contradiction or impossibility	7	1
050. Gypsy, etc. is buried	7	1
051. a shepherd and his dog rejoice	7	1
052. one celebrates a feast	7	1 7
053. a great man is dying	6	1 2
054. witches weep	6	1
055. time to eat a certain dish	6	1
056. mushrooms sprouting	6	1 2
057. saints wander on Earth	6	1

Category in Kuusi (slightly modified)	No.	Locations
058. animal in a certain place	6	1 6
059. feast in Heaven	5	1 7
060. fox's bath	5	1
061. animal feast	5	1 2
062. various expressions about the dead	5	1 2
063. Devil wanders about	5	1
064. a cheat, etc. pays his debts	5	9
065. elves, kobolds, etc. dance	5	1
066. supernatural beings appear	4	1 7
067. fairies are baking	4	1
068. animal death	4	1 2
069. Devil dances or laughs	4	1
070. someone bakes in Hell	4	1
071. witches/old spinsters are tormented	4	1
072. beggars bathe	4	1
073. the queen is weeping	4	1
074. the king is eating	4	1
075. scuffling and rioting	4	1 7 9
076. wolf birth	3	2 9
077. deer birth	3	2
078. hen lays eggs	3	1
079. wolf eats bread and butter	3	1
080. wolf is excreting	3	1
081. wolf has fever	3	1
082. animal happy	3	1
083. animal fight	3	7
084. animals excrete	3	1 7
085. Devil makes butter	3	1
086. fairy wedding	3	1 2
087. kobold children weep	3	1
088. various events in Marseille	3	1
089. makes childrens' hair grow	3	1 2
090. a bath in the higher spheres	3	1 2
091. shepherd's wedding	3	1
092. other references to shepherds	3	1
093. jackal rain	2	2
094. jackal fight	2	2
095. bear dance	2	1
096. ceremonial meal of the dead	2	1
097. the Virgin Mary is baking	2	1
098. carnival and brawl in Hell	2	1
099. death in Hell	2	1
100. Devil's wife has a feast	2	1
101. ghosts are born	2	1 7
102. Gypsies wander about	2	1
103. people get rowdy	2	1
104. a shepherd is eating	2	1
105. the druggists count their debts	2	1 9
106. the sun makes faces	2	1
107. sign of birth	2	2
108. sign of war or peace	2	1 2
109. whale bathes	1	4
110. God chastens his servants	1	1
111. God urinates	1	1
112. Devil's oath	1	1
113. Devil weeps	1	1
114. Devil's urine	1	1
115. fairies comb their hair	1	1
116. brownie rain	1	1
117. Gypsies are at market	1	1
118. people dance	1	1
119. someone defecates	1	1
120. celebration of thieves	1	7
121. poor child is baptized	1	1

Category in Kuusi (slightly modified)	No.	Locations
122. the poor make merry	1	1
123. the poor are beaten	1	1
124. the servants have sex with each other	1	1
125. carnival in a parsonage	1	1
126. the cobbler's sons are born	1	1
127. a sailer is coming to the house	1	1
128. the fleecers are calling	1	1
129. all the soldiers are drinking wine	1	1
130. the queen is smiling	1	1
131. the archbishop is bathing	1	1
132. foolish weather	1	1
133. raven bathes chicks	1	1
134. fox rain	1	1
135. fox blows in the bellows	1	1
136. fox's birth	1	2
137. jackal's birth	1	2
138. bear fight	1	1
139. animal grieves	1	2
140. baptism of the dead	1	1
141. escort in the grave	1	1
142. leopard birth	1	4
143. hyena birth	1	4
144. coyote birth	1	9
145. monkey birth	1	2

Appendix 2: Distribution of the "Fox's Wedding" and Related Terminology.

Sources are: Kuusi (1957), Vaux, email message of 17 December, 1998 sent on linguistlist, Blust, this paper. The material from Kuusi is concentrated mainly in pp. 27–35. Distinguishing details are glossed over in the interest of establishing general categories. Thus, some beliefs specify the sex of the fox which is marrying, others indicate a marriage between different animals (fox and wolf, fox and bear, fox and nightingale), etc. Kuusi in particular cites many variants or separate reports of what is essentially the same belief in the same linguistic group, and these are conflated into one. If a belief is widespread in an area, such as the jackal's wedding in India, a specific location and language group is not indicated. Where essentially the same belief has been reported in more than one of the above sources, the source is given as (multiple). Finally, in addition to the expressions specifically connected with sunshowers which are summarized below, Kuusi (1957: 233) notes similar expressions in connection with the rainbow, which Arabic speakers as well as Rif- and Kabyle-speaking Berbers in Algeria call the "jackal's wedding," and with the double rainbow, which Spanish Basques call the "fox's wedding."

No. Location	Language	Subject	Event	Source
1. Europe				
01. Finland	Finnish	fox	wedding	Kuusi/ Vaux
02. Finland	Finnish	mice	wedding	Vaux
03. SW England	English	fox	wedding	Vaux
04. Bulgaria	Bulgarian	bear	wedding	Vaux
05. Bulgaria	Bulgarian	Devil	wedding	Vaux
06. Bulgaria	Bulgarian	vixen	wedding	Vaux
07. Bulgaria	Bulgarian	fox	wedding	Kuusi

No. Location	Language	Subject	Event	Source
08. Bosnia	Serbo-Croatian	gypsy	wedding	Vaux
09. Serbia	Serbian	Devil	wedding	Vaux
10. Dalmatia	Serbo-Croatian	monk	wedding	Vaux
11. Portugal	Portuguese	fox	wedding	Kuusi
12. Calabria	Greek	fox	wedding	Vaux
13. Corsica	Corsican	fox	flirts	Kuusi
14. Sicily	Sicilian	fox	wedding	Kuusi

2. Levant

01. Lebanon/Syria	Arabic	rat	wedding	Vaux
02. Iran	Aramaic	wolf	wedding	Vaux
03. NE Turkey	Turkish	fox	wedding	Kuusi
04. Turkey	Azeri	jackal	birth	Vaux
05. Azerbaijan	Azerbaijani	fox	wedding	Kuusi
06. Azerbaijan	Azerbaijani	jackal	birth	Kuusi
07. NE Turkey	Armenian	bird	wedding	Vaux
08. Turkey	Turkish	Devil	wedding	Vaux
09. Turkey	Turkish	fox	birth	Kuusi
10. Turkey	Armenian	wolf	birth	Vaux
11. Turkey	Turkish	wolf	wedding	Kuusi
12. ?	Armenian	hind	birth	Vaux
13. ?	Armenian	wolf	wedding	Vaux
14. Iran	Zaza	fox	wedding	Vaux
15. Azerbaijan	Abkhaz	Devil	wedding	Vaux

3. North Africa

01. Morocco	Berber	jackal	wedding	Kuusi
02. Algeria	Kabyle	jackal	wedding	Kuusi
03. Algeria	?	wolf	wedding	Kuusi

4. Sub-Saharan Africa

01. Ethiopia	Amharic	hyena	birth	Vaux
02. Ethiopia	Tigrinya	fox	birth	Vaux
03. Ethiopia	Oromo	hyena	birth	Vaux
04. Senegal	Wolof	hyena	death	Vaux
05. Nigeria	Andoni/Obolo	leopard	birth	Blust
06. Nigeria	Ijo	leopard	birth	Blust
07. Ghana	N. Chumburu	elephant	birth	Blust
08. S. Sudan	Moru	hyena	birth	Blust
09. Uganda	Rutoro	leopard	marriage	Vaux
10. Tanzania	Haya	lion	birth	Blust
11. Tanzania	Swahili	lion	coitus	Vaux
12. Tanzania	Swahili	elephant	coitus	Vaux
13. South Africa	Afrikaans	jackal	wedding	Kuusi
14. South Africa	Afrikaans	monkey	wedding	Vaux
15. South Africa	English	monkey	wedding	Vaux
16. South Africa	Zulu	monkey	wedding	Vaux

5. South Asia

01. Pakistan	(widespread)	jackal	wedding	Kuusi
02. India	(widespread)	jackal	wedding	Kuusi
03. S. India	Malayalam	fox	wedding	Vaux
04. Sri Lanka	Sinhalese	fox	wedding	Kuusi
05. Assam	Assamese	jackal	wedding	Kuusi

6. East Asia

01. Japan	Japanese	fox	wedding	(multiple) Blust
02. Korea	Korean	fox	wedding	Blust
03. Korea	Korean	tiger	wedding	Blust/ Vaux

No.	Location	Language	Subject	Event	Source
7. Southeast Asia					
01.	Malaya	Sakai	tiger	sick	Kuusi/ Blust
02.	N. Sumatra	Toba Batak	tigers	roam	Blust
03.	W. Java	Sundanese	tiger	birth	Blust
04.	Bali	Balinese	spirits	birth	Blust
8. Pacific					
01.	Vanuatu	Bislama	Devil	wedding	Vaux
02.	Fiji	Hindi	siar (deer)	wedding	Vaux
9. Americas					
01.	Mexico	Spanish	rabbit	birth	Vaux
02.	Costa Rica	Spanish	doe	birth	Vaux
03.	Puerto Rico	Spanish	witch	marriage	Vaux
04.	NE Brazil	Portuguese	fox	wedding	Kuusi
05.	Argentina	Spanish	old woman	wedding	Vaux

This paper is a by-product of a much larger project on the ethnology of the rainbow with which I have been involved since the early 1980s. It was only partially written when Bert Vaux of Harvard University issued a request by email (linguistlist, Nov. 6, 1998) for information on terms relating to the sunshower in the languages of the world. A hastily completed version was then mailed to Vaux, and to Mario Alinei. I am greatly indebted to Leon Serafim of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Hawai'i, who first informed me of the request on linguistlist, and to Kakuko Shōji, and Alexander Vovin of the same department for information regarding the fox's wedding in Japan. Vaux has made the results of his sunshower survey public (linguistlist, Dec. 16, 1998), and in addition drew my belated attention to the seminal work of Kuusi (1957). I owe a debt of gratitude to him and to Mario Alinei, both of whom contributed to improvements in the manuscript. Needless to say, I retain sole responsibility for any remaining errors of fact or interpretation.

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